

CONSTRUCTING KOREAN CHRISTIANITY:
NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONARIES' ATTITUDES TOWARD
KOREAN RELIGIONS, 1884-1910

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the first encounter between Western Christianity and Korean religions at the turn of the twentieth century. Its central thesis is that North American missionaries gradually adapted Christianity to Korean culture and religions over the period of one generation. Special attention is given to the missionaries' theology of non-Christian religions and to their mission methods. They drew upon evangelical mission methods and literature used in China, and "fulfillment theory" that appreciated the points of contact between East Asian religions and Christianity. Over time, the missionaries dropped their initial framework of rejecting all Korean tradition as "heathenism." Western Christianity was grafted on to the stems of Korean religions, and a new Korean Christianity flourished in season. The synthesis of Anglo-American-Sino Christianity with Korean spirituality contributed to the astonishing rise of Protestantism in Korea.

The study revises the image of Protestant missionaries from that of fundamentalists and cultural imperialists to that of harbingers of Korean theology. The rehabilitation of their evangelical and indigenizing perspective provides contemporary Korean churches with a sense of historical continuity and a historical framework from which to engage in

... tradition -
... a bridge between
... -
... the roots
... to a Korean

dialogue with non-Christian religions. The dissertation presents a specific case study of cross-cultural theological development by mainline American missionaries during the period of high imperialism. It challenges the generally accepted interpretation of the role of the Protestant missionaries in that period, and mitigates the charges of cultural imperialism, white supremacy, and religious triumphalism often laid at their feet.

The dissertation consists of four issues: North American evangelicalism and mission movements introduced into Korea; Chinese evangelical mission theology, method, and literature transferred to Korea; Protestant missionaries' attitudes toward Korean religions; and features of the Korean Church that had been developed by 1910. The study argues that Protestant missionaries moved beyond proselytism in their approach to Koreans. They respected Korean culture and religions as part of the history of salvation and loved the people with a prophetic spirit. They touched the soul of the Korean people, who linked the missionaries' contributions to movements for a new church and a new nation.



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INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the first encounter of North American missionaries with Korean culture and religions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Its central thesis is that the first generation of North American missionaries gradually contextualized Western Christianity to Korean culture and religions. Special attention is given to the missionaries' mission theory of non-Christian religions and to their mission methods and message. They drew upon the evangelical mission methods and literature naturalized in China, and moderate fulfillment theory that appreciated the points of contact between East Asian Religions and Christianity. Over time, the missionaries dropped their initial framework of the radical displacement of all Korean "heathenism."¹ ^{(Korean traditions) roots} Western Christianity was grafted on the stems of ^{in indigenous} Korean religions, and a new Korean Christianity flourished in season. The synthesis of Anglo-American-Sino Christianity with Korean spirituality contributed to the efflorescence of Protestantism in Korea.

North American missionaries displayed both openness toward Korean religions and culture and a remarkable ability to Christianize certain elements of them, while rejecting others. Their evangelical mission theology maintained the finality of Christ in relation to Korea religions. Yet they searched for the points of contact in Korean religions and welcomed the preparation for the gospel in them. They preached that the fulfillment of Korean religions by Christ would be ^{somewhat} similar to the fulfillment of Judaism by Christ. The interdependence of Confucianism and Christianity, for instance, was depicted as that of the beautiful trees and the sunny spring. The latter would make the former luxuriant and fruitful, whereas the trees could reflect the brilliance of the spring.¹ The integration of Christian transcendence and inculturation, or "combination of

¹ Editorial, "Ryanggyo ga p'ori ga doenan ron" [Confucianism and Christianity: Two Sides of the Same Coin], *Kirisūdo sinmun* [Christian News], Dec. 15, 1898. See Part III, Ch. 5.

vision of “the evangelization of the world in this generation” merged with the strategy of “Christian civilization” to eradicate Korean heathen culture and religions.

This interpretation has been reinforced by American mission scholars as well as by the Korean nationalistic historians and theologians. They criticized missionaries’ collaboration with American exceptionalism and expansionism during the “heyday of colonialism” (1880-1914).⁷ William Hutchison maintained that the liberals and the evangelicals in the late nineteenth century were twins in attempting to conquer so-called “heathen religions.” A new Anglo-Saxon imperialism, armed with Darwinism, advanced with the sense of “white man’s burden” toward the “inferior” races. The enterprise of foreign missions functioned as a “moral equivalent for imperialism,” and transplanted a Western form of Christianity into mission fields. The gospel of “Christian civilization” tried to promote Western education, technology, and secular ideas by means of institutions such as modern hospitals, schools, and printing presses.⁸

In 1919 Arthur J. Brown, one of the general secretaries of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. from 1895 to 1929, initiated the widely accepted interpretation of the early American missionaries in Korea. He described “the typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country” as “a man of the Puritan type”:

He kept the Sabbath as our New England forefathers did a century ago. He looked upon dancing, smoking, and card playing as sins in which no true follower of Christ should indulge. In theology and biblical criticism he was strongly conservative, and he held as a vital truth the premillenarian view of the second coming of Christ. The higher criticism and liberal theology were deemed dangerous heresies. In most of the evangelical churches of America and Great Britain, conservative and liberals have learned to live and work together in peace; but in Korea the few men who hold “the modern view” have a rough road to travel, particularly in the Presbyterian group of missions.⁹

Because Brown had been in conflict with the majority of the Presbyterian missionaries in deciding the new location of the union college in Korea and the adjustment of mission schools to

⁷ S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 322-96; D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 298-302. Cf. T. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7-33.

⁸ W. R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 91-124.

⁹ A. J. Brown, *Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), 540.

the requirements of the Japanese government since 1910, he intentionally emphasized their exclusive and uncooperative attitude toward a more liberal and modern view, which was actually his own position on educational mission.¹⁰ Most Northern Presbyterian missionaries under his own supervision, together with Southern (PCUS), Australian and Canadian Presbyterians, insisted on educating children of Christians in P'yŏngyang rather than conducting broader secular education in Seoul. After a decade of heated controversy on the "College Question," Brown's evaluation of missionaries in Korea was altered from praising their qualifications in the 1900s to criticizing their exclusivism and conservatism in 1919.¹¹

Thus we had better remember the following letter, written by Mrs. Evelyn Roberts in 1920, whenever we encounter the citation of Dr. Brown's above passage.

From little intimations in your letters at times, I am led to believe that your Korea family has been a great problem to you and Mr. Scott frankly told us last summer that no other secretary would relieve you of the care of us even when you asked it. (We're so thankful they wouldn't!) I also sometimes think you may yearn for some expression of our love and esteem ~~for some expression of our love and esteem~~ and I fear we have too often, under the stress of other things, neglected to express what we feel. We come to you always as to a big Santa Claus with our wants and desires and needs, and when they are not granted, we feel like the small boy with the empty stocking, and we are apt to express our disappointment very freely, and we have differences of opinion amongst ourselves, and we appeal to you as representative of a higher court, and when the decision goes against our will or better judgment then you hear all about that, and in some cases, I fear, even bitter animosities have been expressed in correspondence with you. I don't know, but I hope that the really bitter untempered things that you have had to read have been limited at least to a very few

¹⁰ The Board (represented by Brown) supported the minority group of Seoul (represented by H. G. Underwood) against more than two thirds of the others including the P'yŏngyang missionaries (represented by J. E. Adams, W. M. Baird, and S. A. Moffett). The Methodist missionaries also preferred the Chosen Christian College of Seoul to Sungsil Christian College of P'yŏngyang as a union college. This heated conflict was basically related to the issue of the authority between the Board of New York and the Mission of Korea. In other words, could the New York board make a decision against the majority opinion of the mission field? Korea missionaries opposed establishing a large and secular college, because they feared that it would foster the spirit of institutionalism. This controversy produced many pages of correspondence on both sides, some of which were compiled into a book titled *Presentation of Difficulties Arisen in the Chosen [Korea] Mission, Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. Because of a Lack of Definition between the Foreign Board and itself concerning their Mutual Responsibilities in the Administration of Field Work* (New York: privately printed, 1919).

¹¹ Brown himself praised American missionaries' wise policy and unceasing zeal in utilizing great evangelistic opportunities, and defended the positive side of the rapid growth of the Korean Church in 1901 and 1909 when he visited Korea. (A. J. Brown, *Report of a Visitation of the Korea Mission of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions* (New York: BFMPUSA, 1902); *Report on a Second Visit to China, Japan, and Korea, 1909* (New York: BFMPUSA, 1909). Actually Brown supported Sungsil Union College in P'yŏngyang in the early 1900s.

individuals if not to a very few letters. ... Children are careless about expressing affection to their parents, and your relation to our missions has been so intimate, I fear, as to put you in that same position—you have had to take much of our esteem for granted. Please forgive us for this and believe that we all do love and esteem you and Mrs. Brown very highly.

I am not one of the so-called “Minority” of the Mission. I feel very strongly on the “College question.” I am a strait-laced Calvinist, and a “pre-mil” and as “Anti-Japanese” as anybody, and all the other terrible things that the Korea Mission is accused of, but how people can differ so radically on many questions and yet work shoulder to shoulder and love and pray heart to heart, is one of the lessons I have learned through the power of the Holy Spirit, in fellowship with this splendid Mission! I have seen men argue questions on the Mission floor until they became so heated it seemed as if they would like to full each others hair—then after the session heartily shake hands, and bury the hatchet. But more often I have seen them argue and plead, without animus, but with deep feeling almost to tears, over some cherished plan or idea, then when an adverse decision was rendered, bow a moment in silent prayer to accept it rightly. ... For several years, we have “worn ourselves to a frazzle” arguing the pros and cons of our schools conforming to the Government regulations. Meantime in a way no one could possibly foresee, things were all completely overturned, quite without our effort, and outside of all our wisdom, and behold! The regulations are all revised, and there is no question to argue more! I am quite sure there will be just some such happy issue to all our problems, if we can but wait and pray and love.¹²

Although the majority of the Presbyterian Korea mission was conservative in theology, premillennial in eschatology, and Anti-Japanese in politics, they were not a group of peculiar separatists but a spiritual community of working shoulder-to-shoulder and praying heart to heart.

Furthermore, with the simplified portrayal of the founding missionaries as Puritanical moralists, conservative premillennialists, and rigid exclusivists, Brown argued that the first generation of Korean Christians naturally reproduced the missionary type: escapism from the destructive world, manifest evangelistic zeal, strict Sabbath observance, rigid doctrinal conviction, literal acceptance of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and inflexible opposition to anything that did not accord with the accepted type. If his argument were true, the early Korean Church would have been a replica of “strongly conservative” American Protestantism, and an enemy to the traditional Korean religions.

Brown’s caricature, unfortunately written before the March First Movement in 1919, has been recited by Korean historiography for the past five decades. It produced negative images of

¹² Mrs. Evelyn M. Roberts to A. J. Brown, May 18, 1920 (New Haven: Yale Divinity School Library, A. J. Brown Papers). When Brown read this letter, he underlined again the word “love.” After the March First Independence Movement in 1919, mainly supported by the Korean Christians, the Japanese government moderated the regulations of the mission schools.

the pioneer missionaries and their Korean converts.¹³ When Korea was liberated from the thirty-six year rule of Japanese colonialism in 1945, its southern part was occupied by the U. S. forces. The American Military Government (1945-48) employed some senior American missionaries as interpreters and advisors. During the Korean War (1950-53), many church leaders were killed, and the Presbyterian Church split over the “Shinto Shrine Question.” A great number of Christian refugees from the communist North Korea formed a considerable constituency in South. Their conservatism and provincialism complicated the process of reconstruction of the Korean Churches, in which some American missionaries became deeply involved with powerful American dollars. The Korean churches were splitting and suffering from the absence of cooperation, leadership, and identity.

In his doctoral dissertation of 1955, therefore, Sung Chun Chun [Chŏn Sŏng-ch’ŏn] severely criticized the narrow and limited theology of the early Presbyterian missionaries as the background of the schism in the Korean churches.

The early missionaries in Korea came almost exclusively from the area where the Old-School ideas were dominant. A few Methodists from New England were the exception. It was natural that Dr. Nevius and his Korean colleagues were extreme conservatives or fundamentalists since their training had been along these lines.¹⁴

Their fundamentalism, he insisted, failed to recognize the value of Korean culture maintained by the Confucian higher class. Above all, comity was “one of the most unfortunate arrangements that Protestantism unwittingly offered the Korean Christians,” because it fostered isolation and provincialism which spawned the phenomenal schisms of the Korean Presbyterian churches.

The struggle for national identity in the so-called “third world” and Asian nationalism in the 1950s led to such rhetoric. Chai Choon Kim [Kim Chae-jun] (1901-87), a founder of anti-

¹³ Lak-Geon Paik [Paik Nak-chun]’s doctoral dissertation at Yale University in 1927 was an exception. His missionary perspective, guided by K. S. Latourette, positively evaluated the pioneer missionaries’ evangelicalism: their ecumenical spirit, social works, and efforts of indigenization. (L. G. Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* (Pyong Yang: Union Christian College Press, 1929), 149-55.) This seminal study was published in Korea both in English (1929) and Korean (1973). But he was critical of the Presbyterian “Nevius method” and its conservative policy of theological education.

¹⁴ Chun Sung-chun, “Schism and Unity in the Protestant Churches of Korea,” Ph. D., Yale Univ., 1955, 67.

missionary and relatively “liberal” Chosŏn Theological Seminary in Seoul in 1940, separated himself from the majority Presbyterians dominated by conservatism and provincialism in 1952, and endorsed Chun’s assertion: “strangely enough, in the end of the nineteenth century, the Princetonian missionaries transplanted conservative orthodoxy to Korea and established an empire of Korean orthodox Presbyterianism by protecting its conservatism with an iron curtain for five decades.”¹⁵ *The early end of 19th c. missionaries were more from Mc Lennan, not Princeton.*

In 1957 a newly issued monthly, *Kidokkyo sasang* [Christian Thought], held a symposium on “Christianity and Korean Culture.” Ch’ae P’il-gŭn argued that vague forms of Trinity and Christology could be found in Asian religions.¹⁶ David Chung [Chŏng Dae-wi], in his doctoral study in 1959, maintained that the diffusion and convergence of Christianity with Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shamanism contributed to the explosive growth of the Korean churches.¹⁷ The positive view on the Korean religious heritages for the progress of Korean Christianity gave inspiration to a group of liberal Korean theologians in the 1960s, when the Koreans could begin to search their cultural and national identity after the national ordeals.¹⁸ They were concerned ^{to form a} ~~with~~ “Korean theology” by indigenizing the Christian gospel and reevaluating Korean religions and culture. They differentiated their theological identity from the conservative majority who held fast to the missionary heritage of fundamentalism.¹⁹ They insisted

¹⁵ Kim Chai-jun, “Taehan Kidokkyo Changnohoe ŭi yŏksa jŏk ŭiŭi” [The Historical Meaning of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea], *Sipchakun* [Crusades] 25 (Seoul: 1956).

¹⁶ Ch’ae P’il-gŭn, “Tongyang sasang gwa Kŭrisŭdo,” [Eastern Thought and Christ] *Kidokkyo sasang* [Christian Thought] (Jan. & Feb. 1958).

¹⁷ David Chung, “Religious Syncretism in Korean Society,” Ph. D. Yale Univ., 1959. See its Ch. 8 “Confucianism and Christianity: Morphological Analogy,” Ch. 9 “Buddhism and Christianity: Paradise in the Great Beyond,” Ch. 10 “Taoism and Christianity: Unio Mystica,” and Ch. 11 “Christianity and Popular Belief of Korean Society: New Discovery of an Old Faith.”

¹⁸ Cf. S. J. Palmer, an American historian of religion, asserted in 1967 that the early missionaries’ insight into the cultural congeniality between nineteenth-century Korea and ancient biblical Palestine contributed to the rapid growth of Protestantism in Korea. He argued that the missionaries’ adoption of the Korean shamanistic term for God, *Hanim*, provided them with a point of contact between the Christian gospel and Korean culture. (S. J. Palmer, *Korea and Christianity: The Problem of Identification with Tradition* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 5-33.)

¹⁹ Chung Chai-sik’s doctoral dissertation in 1964 investigated the relationship of Protestantism and the formation of modern Korea. He emphasized the role of Protestantism as an initiator of social change in modern Korea. He also accepted Brown’s puritanical-fundamentalist image of the early missionaries, and

that the otherworldly, legalistic, and militant characteristic of Korean Protestant theology originated from American fundamentalist orthodoxy passed down by missionaries.²⁰ Tong-Shik Ryu [Yu Tong-sik], asserting continuity between the Christian gospel and Korean national traditions, criticized conservative fundamentalism for its exclusive attitude toward Korean religions.²¹

Minjung theologians retained this strong anti-missionary perspective from the 1970s. They declared that the early missionaries introduced a god of Western civilization and killed the God of the Korean people, who has been with them through history. According to Kyung Jae Kim [Kim Kyōng-jae], “The conservative orthodox mission theologians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarded the cultural soil as not only lifeless but also barren and desolate, a wilderness full of poisonous weeds.” The early missionaries’ theological position, therefore, was “fundamentalist conservative, combative anti-rationalism, a-historical futurism, and anti-cultural.”²² Recently Chai-yong Choo [Chu Chai-yong] insisted again that the early Korean church was captivated by missionaries’ colonial theology.²³

At the memorial theological conference for the centennial of Korean Christianity in 1984, Sunwhan Pyun [Pyōn Sōn-whan], a religious pluralist, demanded that not only “religious imperialism or exclusivism which demonizes or curses other religions, but ^{also} the fulfillment theory which regards them as ‘preparatio evangelica’ should be discarded and sublated.”²⁴ His

analyzed their negative attitude toward traditional Korean society and religions. (Chai-sik Chung, “Protestantism and the Formation of Modern Korea,” Ph. D. Boston Univ., 1964.)

²⁰ Kim Chai-jun, “Present Situation and Future Prospect,” H. S. Hong, et al., eds., *Korea Struggles For Christ: Memorial Symposium for the Eightieth Anniversary of Protestantism in Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society in Korea, 1966), 32.

²¹ Yu Tong-sik, “Han’guk kyohoe ūi t’och’akhwa yuhyōng gwa sinhak,” [Types and Theology of Indigenization of Korean Church]. *Sinhak nondan* [Theological Forum] 14 (Seoul: July 1980): 20-2; *Han’guk sinhak ūi gwangmaek* [Ore of Korean Theology] (Seoul: Chonmangsa, 1982): 43, 187, & 332.

²² Kim Kyung-jae, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 1994), 121.

²³ Chu Chai-yong, *Han’guk Kūrisūdogyo sinhak sa* [A History of Christian Theology in Korea] (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1998), 51-100.

²⁴ Pyun Sun-whan, “T’ajonggyo wa sinhak” [Other Religions and Theology], *Sinhak sasang* [Theological Thought] 47 (Seoul: Winter 1984): 695.

iconoclastic rejection of imported Western theology primarily targeted missionary fundamentalism and exclusive Christology.

Theological conservatives, on the other hand, affirmed Brown's interpretation to buttress their own conservative orthodoxy and to block theological innovations. Hyung Ryong Park [Pak Hyŏng-nyong], the godfather of ^{Korean} conservative orthodoxy, declared that "his long-cherished desire is to deliver to the new generation the same theology that the Western missionaries brought to Korea eighty years ago."²⁵ He insisted that "the suitable relationship of Christianity to heathenism is not compromise but conquest."²⁶

Park's formula, the radical conquest of Korean religions by Christianity, was preserved by his followers in Presbyterian General Assembly Theological Seminary in Seoul. Harvie M. Conn, a professor of the seminary, accepted Brown's authority by saying that the history of the Korean church in its early years "is the history of conservative, evangelical Christianity" and "the early theological leadership was strongly conservative."²⁷ ^{But} Although Conn interpreted the early missionaries' conservative theology positively, ^{and} avoiding the term "fundamentalism," he borrowed the term "conservative" from J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*.²⁸ Recently Yong-Kyu Park defended the early missionaries' constructive role in the shaping of the conservative biblicism and revivalism of the Korean Presbyterian Church.²⁹

Nationalistic church historians also accepted Brown's stereotype. Kyung Bae Min [Min Kyŏng-bae], who initiated the "national church perspective" against the missionary one in the

²⁵ Pak Hyung-nyong, *Kyoŭi sinhak* [Dogmatic Theology] (Seoul: 1964), Introduction. Cf. Chang Dong-min, "A Theological Biography of Hyung Nong Park (1897-1978)," Ph. D. Westminster Th. Sem., 1998.

²⁶ Pak Hyung-nyong, "Igyo e daehan t'ahyŏp munje" [The Problem of Compromise with Heathenism], *Sinhak chinam* [Theological Review] 33-3 (March 1966),

²⁷ Harvie M. Conn, "Studies in the Theology of the Korean Presbyterian Church: An Historical Outline," Part I, *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Nov. 1966 to May 1967), 24-5; Kim Nam-sik and H. M. Conn, *Hankuk Changnokyo Sinhak Sasangsa I* [A History of Theological Thought in Korean Presbyterian Church] (Seoul: Bethany Book House, 1997), 85-96.

²⁸ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956)

²⁹ Pak Yong-gyu, "Korean Presbyterianism and Biblical Authority: The Role of Scripture in the Shaping of Korean Presbyterianism 1918-54," Ph. D. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1991, 248-51.

1970s, popularized “Brown’s Puritan paradigm.”³⁰ He defined the earlier American missionaries as pietistic evangelicals and revivalistic Methodists, and blamed them for their westernization of Christianity in Korea.³¹ He pointed out that their negative characteristics were “theological poverty, weak ecclesiology, individualistic soteriology, apolitical quietism, anti-intellectualism, and dualistic faith.”³² They also transplanted American institutional denominationalism without due concern for indigenized and nationalistic Korean Christianity.

In the late 1980s Yi Mahn-yol, a seasoned Korean historian who had investigated the nationalistic and modernizing role of earlier Protestantism, emphasized Koreans’ initiative in the process of accepting Christianity. At the same time, delving into anti-Christian incidents, he criticized the early missionaries’ sense of “the great Westerner” and racial superiority, implantation of Western culture, and collaboration with pro-Japanese colonialism.³³

Lee Tök-chu, a Methodist historian, identified the early Presbyterian missionaries’ evangelical theology with fundamentalism, and contrasted it with the comparatively liberal Methodist tendency. He said, “Early missionaries’ closed protectionism curtailed Korean Christians’ subjective theological productivity, and the inevitable result was theological dependence on the missionaries.”³⁴

³⁰ Lee Seung-Joon, “The Significance of Eschatology in the Shaping of Korean Evangelical Religion, 1883-1945,” Ph. D. Drew Univ., 1997, 20-3.

× ³¹ Min Kyung-bae, *Han’guk Kidok kyohoe sa* [A Korean Church History] (Seoul: Korean Christian Press, 1972, 1984), 148-9; *Han’guk minjok kyohoe hyöngsöng sa* [A History of the Development of the Korean National Church] (Seoul: Yonsei Univ. Press, 1974), 31-5; *Han’guk Kidok kyohoe sa*, new rev. ed. (Seoul: Yonsei Univ. Press, 1993), 144-5; “Han’guk ch’odae kyohoe wa söguhwa üi munje” [Early Korean Church and the Problem of Westernization], *Kidokkyo sasang* [Christian Thought] (Dec. 1971): 44-50.

³² Min Kyung-bae, *Han’guk Kidok kyohoe sa*, 149.

³³ Yi Mahn-yol, “Miguk kye söngyosa düi üi ch’ogi whaldong” [Early Works of American Missionaries], *Pit kwa sogüm* [Light and Salt] (Seoul: Dec. 1987); “Han’guk Kidokkyo wa Miguk üi yöngnyang” [Korean Christianity and American Influence], *Han’guk kwa Miguk* [Korea and America] 3 (Masan, Korea: The Institute of the Far Eastern Affairs, Kyongnam Univ., 1988); *Han’guk kidokkyo wa minjok üisik* [Korean Christianity and National Consciousness] (Seoul: Chisiksanöpsa, 1991), 391-3.

³⁴ Lee Tök-chu, “Han’guk Kidokkyo wa gūnbonjuüi: Han’guk kyohoe sa jök Ipchang” [Korean Church and Fundamentalism: From the Viewpoint of Korean Church History], The Institute for Korean Church History ed. *Han’guk kidokkyo sasang* [Korean Christian Thought] (Seoul: Yonsei Univ. Press, 1998), 24-9; “Ch’ogi naehan söngyosa düi üi sinang gwa sinhak” [Faith and Theology of the Early Missionaries to Korea], *Han’guk kidokkyo wa yöksa* [Christianity and History in Korea] 6 (Seoul: IKCH, Feb. 1997), 59.

Neither the polarization between conservatives and liberals, nor the reiterated term “conservative fundamentalism” in Korean church historiography, however, represent mission theology of the first generation missionaries correctly. Without doing actual historical research, most Korean church historians simply have copied each other and repeated the outdated interpretation. But Samuel H. Moffett, a preeminent mission historian, maintained that the early missionaries belonged to “nineteenth century evangelicalism” in the best sense of that word, not to the divisive and polemic fundamentalism of the twentieth century that “tore the American church apart into warring segments, liberals against conservatives, and modernists against fundamentals.”³⁵ The image of the pioneer Protestant missionaries as the antagonistic destroyers of Korean religions and culture cannot be compatible with the historical evidences of their diverse efforts to establish indigenous Korean Christianity. After S. H. Moffett’s brief defense of their moderate evangelicalism, there has been no notable study on this subject.³⁶ Thus delving into the dynamic evangelical mission theology of the first generation of the American missionaries will open for us a more correct way of understanding early Korean church history.

B. Significance of the Study

Through scrutinizing the primary sources, this study is a fresh research into the long neglected subject of the early American missionaries’ attitudes toward Korean religions and culture. It revises their image from that of conservative fundamentalists and cultural imperialists, who tried to obliterate Korean religions and culture, to that of pioneers of contextualized Korean theology. After jettisoning their initial inadequate formula, the total rejection of all Korean

³⁵ S. Hugh Moffett, “The Life and Thought of Samuel Austin Moffett, His Children’s Memories,” *The Centennial Lecture of Samuel A. Moffett’s Arrival in Korea* (Seoul: Presbyterian Theological College and Seminary, May 18, 1990), 19.

³⁶ There are two recent studies related to the early missionaries’ theology: Seung-Joon Lee’s dissertation on their eschatology (1997), and Jong Koe Paik’s study on the theology and doctrines of their literature. Paik’s main thesis is that “the Christian faith propagated by the early Protestant missionaries to their Korean audiences was a modification of the evangelical pietistic form of Protestant Christianity they confessed at home.” (Paik Jong-koe, *Constructing Christian Faith in Korea: The Earliest Protestant Mission and Ch’oe Pyŏng-hŏn* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1998), 224.)

traditions, the first generation missionaries penetrated into the deeper world of Korean language, thought, history, and religious traditions. In the process they began to destigmatized so-called Korean "heathenism." Contextualized mission theology and literature, developed by a small group of progressive senior missionaries in China, stimulated young missionaries to adapt them to culturally similar Korea and formulate their own contextual mission theology. They realized that the incarnation of the Christian gospel in the soil of Korean religions and culture was indispensable for the evangelization of the Korean people.

The rehabilitation of the evangelical and indigenous perspective of the earlier American missionaries and Korean Christians provides contemporary Korean churches with a sense of historical continuity and a historical framework from which to engage in dialogue with non-Christian religions. It could connect the past legacy with the present need for Korean theology. The story of the synthesis of American-Sino-Korean elements in early Korean Christianity will show Koreans' potentiality to create a more fulfilled form of religion for the Korean soul and mind by grafting the Christian gospel on to indigenous and traditional beliefs.

The dissertation presents a specific case study of cross-cultural theological development by mainline North American missionaries during the period of high imperialism. It challenges the generally accepted interpretation of the role of the evangelical missionaries in that period, and mitigates the charges of cultural imperialism, white supremacy, and religious triumphalism often laid at their feet.

C. Methodology and Limitations

This research employs historical method, namely, the process of critically analyzing and interpreting human records and texts of the past. The diverse fields of church history, history of Christian thought, mission history, history of missiology, history of comparative religion, and Korean history will be applied to this study.

The study is limited to the first quarter (1884-1910) of Korean Protestant history. The first encounter between American missionaries and Korean religions and culture will show the dynamic process of the indigenization of Western Christianity.

The dissertation focuses on American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries who together represented more than seventy percent of the entire missionary force. But it will not ignore the contribution of minority missionary groups.

The main question is "What was the American missionaries' attitudes toward Korean religions and culture?" Yet "How the Korean Christians viewed the foreign missionary enterprise and Western Christianity" is a guiding perspective. At the same time, this study delves into the Korean Christians' role in the process of the indigenization of Christianity.

Although the dissertation mainly describes male missionaries' contribution to the indigenization of American Christianity in Korea, it will not neglect women missionaries' theory and their relation with Korean women's religions.

Finally, this study pays due attention to the dual perception of the pioneer missionaries.³⁷ As the link between Korean minds and American civilization, and between Korean hearts and the Christian gospel, they were perceived with "historical ambivalence." They were understood as ostensible benefactors of the Korean people in the eyes of some and as cultural imperialists in the eyes of others. Thus this study will keep the balance between hagiography and criminal history or Korean nationalistic historiography, which overstressed the negative role of the missionaries. This dissertation, however, will pay more attention to their positive role in the cultural and religious history of modern Korea.

The insights and methods of the following mission scholars have informed this study. Lamin Sanneh maintains that "the transability of the gospel" relativizes any culture and cleanses

³⁷ John K. Fairbank, "Introduction; The Place of Protestant Writings in China's Cultural History," Suzanne W. Barnett and John K. Fairbank eds., *Christianity in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 2.

all cultures and languages of all stigma of inferiority.³⁸ Christian mission as translation, namely, the vernacularization of Christianity, functions as an agent begetting cultural nationalism against Western colonialism and fosters vital, indigenous, and multicultural native churches. “Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission,” says Andrew F. Walls. He envisions that cultural diversity of world Christianity in geographical and historical forms is necessity for the fullness of Christ to be known. The creative tension between the “indigenous”(localizing) principle and the “pilgrim”(universalizing) principle, he asserts, should be maintained in the mission movements for their theological authenticity.³⁹ Dana L. Robert’s *American Women in Mission* challenges both the male-dominated and intellectual mission history.⁴⁰ It is a groundbreaking study on women’s contributions to the creation of American mission theories. She recaptures distinctive stories of American women’s holistic mission theories, based on their personal letters, journals, diaries, and reports, with insights into their relationship with institutional organizations, and their social and cultural experiences. Kenneth Cracknell explores the rich heritage of the mission theology of religions represented at the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910.⁴¹ His study reveals that mission theology of religions was not monolithic, but pluralistic and diverse at the turn of the twentieth century.

D. Primary Sources

This research uses the following primary sources. First, the English materials, produced by American foreign mission organizations, student mission movements, and their representative promoters and theologians, are investigated in order to understand the missiological background of the missionaries to Korea. The development of the mission theologies of the Presbyterian and

³⁸ L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 1 & 47.

³⁹ A. F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 7-15.

⁴⁰ D. L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1997).

⁴¹ K. Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy, and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995)

Methodist churches and their seminaries where the missionaries were trained is examined through these organizations' literature as well as mission magazines.

Secondly, the pioneer missionaries' translations for the target audience are investigated. In particular, the dissertation scrutinizes the apologetic and missiological works of the missionaries in China, which directly influenced the missionaries in Korea. The debates and decisions at the missionary conferences held in Shanghai in 1877 and 1890 are useful resources for understanding the missiological horizon of the early Korean missions. This study examines more than eighty apologetic and evangelistic tracts that were published by the missionaries in Korea from 1889 to 1900. Most of them were translated from Chinese tracts written by experienced evangelical missionaries in China.

Thirdly, the following literature of the missionaries in Korea is analyzed: various versions and editions of the early Korean Scriptures and hymns, containing diverse kinds of terms adopted in China and borrowed from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and shamanism; the periodicals and papers published in Korea either in English or Korean; the individual missionaries' essays and books on Korean culture and religions; their personal letters and diaries, and their sermons. Finally, Korean Christians' literature, especially their confessions of faith, hymnals, and apologetic tracts, is investigated.

E. Outline

The three following theological sources were integrated into early indigenous Korean Christianity: (1) American evangelical Protestantism and its missiological insights into Eastern Asian religions and culture accumulated in the nineteenth century, (2) Chinese apologetic tracts and missiological works by seasoned missionaries in China, and (3) Korean traditional religions and culture. The Chinese sources, on which young missionaries in Korea were considerably dependent during the 1890s, played an effective catalytic role in the synthesis of the two foreign elements: Anglo-American Christianity and Korean culture and religions.

The dissertation consists of the following four main parts: (1) North American evangelicalism and mission movements introduced into Korea, (2) Chinese mission theories and methods adopted by the Korean missions and Chinese tracts, apologetics, and Bibles circulated and translated in Korea; (3) Missionaries' attitude toward Korean religions and culture: their initial response, revised attitude, term question, fulfillment theory, points of conflict between Christianity and Korean religions—spirit and idol worship, ancestor worship, and polygamy—, and points of contacts between Christianity and Confucianism, Shamanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Tonghak, and folk religions; and (4) Indigenous Korean Church: Koreans Christians' conversion experiences and fulfillment theory, Korean Christians' apologetics, and features of the Korean Church that had been developed by 1910. The study concludes that Protestant missionaries moved beyond proselytism in their approach to Koreans. They respected Korean culture and religions as part of the history of salvation and loved the people with a prophetic spirit. They touched the soul of the Korean people, who linked the missionaries' contributions to movements for a new church and a new nation.

